

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

COLUMBIA

GENTLEMEN OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

For some years past, the Conference of Southern Governors has been studying the possibility of establishing and maintaining regional educational institutions, as a means of affording within the economic means of the Southern States separate but equal opportunity for education in the South.

Such institutions would be jointly owned and operated by the States cooperating in their establishment, on a proportionate basis fairly arrived at by agreement. The plan envisioned a compact among the participating States duly approved by the Congress in accordance with the United States Constitution.

Last October the subject was discussed at length at the Asheville, North Carolina, meeting of the Southern Governors, and the Education Committee of the Conference called a special meeting at Tallahassee, Florida, on February 7th and 8th, 1948, to consider certain proposals formulated as a result of the plight of the Meharry Medical College at Memphis, Tennessee, which the Committee thought would furnish a logical beginning of the regional program.

I attended this special meeting, accompanied by three members of the General Assembly: Senator George Warren, Senator J. B. Pruitt, and Representative Charles N. Plowden. I invited these gentlemen to go with me and give me the benefit of their advice and assistance in the matter. The Governors of the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, and Texas were also in attendance.

The Education Committee submitted a draft of a proposed regional education compact for the consideration of the 15 States

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represented in the Conference, with particular reference to the Meharry Medical College, and stated that in the opinion of the Committee the time had come to proceed with the program, in order that Confressional consideration of the compact could be requested.

The following circumstances were brought to the attention of the Conference:

Meharry Medical College is one of the two outstanding graduate schools offering medical, dental, and nursing training and education for Negroes in the United States. Among its present students are 18 Negroes from South Carolina. It is an endowed institution, but for several years the lowered income from its endowment and higher costs of medical education have caused it to operate at a deficit, and it will have to close its doors after June, 1948. The Trustees have offered to convey the institution to the 15 States represented in the Southern Governors' Conference and to pay over annually the entire net income from its endowment funds to the States if they will jointly operate the College as a public institution. If the College closes, the present students will be without an institution in which to complete their education, and will have to return to their respective States, and of course no more students will be educated by this grade "A" institution. The College has had many applications from white students, but has carried out its purpose of affording medical educational opportunities to Negroes by pursuing a strict policy of racial separation and has accepted only Negro applicants. South Carolina's share of the institution's operation would be between 4 and 5 per cent, according to our information, if all 15 of the States in the Southern Governors' Conference participate.

The compact was a tentative one, because its signature by the Governors is subject to the approval of the Legislatures of the several States, and the compact itself is also subject to the approval of the Congress of the United States. Moreover, the compact itself makes provision for the withdrawal of any State which may not want to continue in the regional enterprise, and also requires each State's consent to participate in the maintenance and operation of any

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additional institutions which may be proposed at any later date. For the present, therefore, the only commitment proposed is in reference to Meharry Medical College.

Briefly summarized, the compact provides:

1. The Trustees of Meharry Medical College will turn over to the Southern States, or an agency acting in their behalf, its lands, buildings, equipment, and the net income from its endowment. The States will operate the College as a regional institution for medical, dental, and nursing education, upon terms and conditions to be agreed upon by the States and the Trustees of the College.

2. The participating States will create a joint agency known as the Board of Control for Southern Regional Education. The Governors of the States subscribing to the agreement will serve as ex-officio members of the Board, and they will each appoint two additional members to represent their respective States.

3. The Board will meet annually and elect a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and such additional officers as may be provided for by the Board. The officers will serve until the next annual meeting.

4. The Board may establish by-laws not inconsistent with the compact, and shall have the right to create and appoint an Executive Committee and a Finance Committee, with such power and authority as the Board sees fit to provide.

5. The Board shall submit plans and recommendations to the States, for approval and adoption by appropriate legislation, for the development, establishment, acquisition, operation, and maintenance of other educational schools and institutions within the geographical area of the participating States, of such character and type and for such educational, professional, technological, scientific, literary, or other purposes as the States may determine to be proper, necessary, or advisable.

6. The title to any regional institutions, and to all properties and facilities used in connection therewith, shall be vested in the Board of Control as the agency of, and for the use and benefit of, the States which enter the compact, and their citizens.

7. Any two or more States which are parties to the compact may enter into supplemental compacts providing for the establishment, financing and operation of additional regional educational institutions for the benefit of the citizens of the area comprised of the States making the supplemental compact. Such institutions shall be financed solely by the States creating them. The Board members from such states will control such institutions.

8. When authorized by their respective Legislatures, the States entering the compact will pay over to the Board of Control funds for the establishment, acquisition, operation and maintenance of such regional educational institutions as the States may authorize. The contribution of each State to the total funds shall be in the proportion which its population bears to the total population of the participating States.

9. The compact will take effect when 6 or more States have approved it by appropriate legislative action, within 18 months of February 8, 1948. It shall become binding upon those 6 States 60 days after legislative approval by the 6th State and the Governors of those States shall immediately appoint Board members.

10. Any Governor of a State which is a party to the compact may then call the Board into session so that it may organize. Any other Southern State may become a party to the compact within 2 years of February 8, 1948, by appropriate legislative action.

11. The compact shall continue without any time limitation, and may be terminated at any time by unanimous consent.

12. Any State, with the approval of its Legislature, may withdraw from the compact 2 years after written notice to the Board, but will be responsible for its obligations up to the effective date of withdrawal, and relinquishes its interest in any property or funds vested in the Board.

13. Any State which defaults in the performance of its obligations under the compact will be suspended automatically from the date of such default, and unless the default is made good within 1 year, an affirmative vote of three-fourths of the Board

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members (excluding members from the State in default) may terminate the compact as to that State, which shall lose its interest in the property or funds vested in the Board but shall be responsible for its obligations already accrued.

Every Governor attending the conference regarded the program as a progressive step. Even aside from the possible effect of the establishment of Meharry Medical College as a regional institution on the situation presented by the recent Oklahoma decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, those who attended the conference very generally reached the conclusion that the joint maintenance and operation of Meharry Medical College by the Southern States would be a worthy objective in itself, because of the critical need of Negro doctors and nurses which it is filling. The proposed regional compact was signed for their States by all the Governors in attendance at Tallahassee, with Meharry to be the first regional school to be established.

The approval by the Legislatures of the several States will enable the compact to be presented to the Congress for its approval, and the development of concrete proposals for other institutions, White as well as Negro, will be enabled to go forward, with no obligation on our part as a State to enter into any which we do not regard as desirable to us or within our means. We shall be obligated to nothing which the Legislature of this State does not agree to by appropriate legislative enactment.

I send this message to you as information. The plan presents a new approach to the solution of many of our educational problems. The compact was signed by me in order that it could be placed before the General Assembly for your thoughtful and serious consideration and such action as you may deem advisable and expedient. From my own investigation I am convinced that the general plan has considerable merit and, therefore, it is deserving of your study.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Strom Thurmond
Governor

February 18, 1948